



SHANTHIMALAI RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Shiva Nagar, Tiruvannamalai 606 603, Tamil Nadu, India. Telephone: (91) 4175 22127 - Telefax (91) 4175 22837

E-mail: smtrust@md2.vsnl.net.in - Website: <http://www.shanthimalai.org>

Shanthimalai Research & Development Trust

We would at the outset like to express that we are neither a sect, nor a religious, political or any other community with special interests. We are like-minded individuals, led together through the knowledge that we know nothing. Exactly this insight urges us to come to the very experience of the oneness of life, which indwells in all beings. This spirit of life permeates and embraces each one. It is inherent, and at the same time, transcends everything. To think about this is one thing, yet, to experience this is quite another thing.

Where one is for all, and all are for one, then neither the one nor the all can fall!

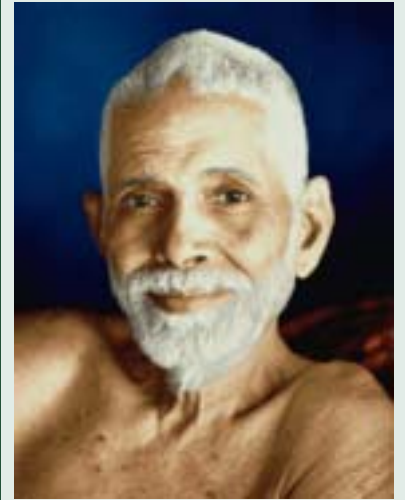
About developing countries, we always hear only about their poverty and suffering. One never notices the outstanding achievements of these ancient cultures in art, science, philosophy, and religion; achievements through which these nations emerged. These achievements and their corresponding values are part of a deeply-rooted human dignity which is often hidden to the western eye. But these values are still very much alive, and to be respected by us we, who would be their friends in need. Only in this way can there be a fruitful reciprocity.

Many people here live in unimaginable misery, but, in spite of this, they retain their luminous spirituality and human dignity to a large degree. The quest for these unchanging, eternal values of human existence, common to us all, has led many men and women from the west to a small town in South India, called Tiruvannamalai.

Here, from 1896 to 1950, lived one of India's greatest sages, Sri Ramana Maharshi. His life and teachings of compassionate love for all his fellow beings have been an inspiration for so many seekers, both East and West.

In 1959, nine years after Sri Ramana attained Nirvana, an ardent spiritual seeker originally from Reutlingen, Germany, arrived in Tiruvannamalai. The town, situated at the foot of the great mountain Arunachala, is considered sacred by the Indians since ancient times. It was here that the great sage Ramana had spent his entire life after leaving home at the age of sixteen. Over the years, a small hermitage had sprung up around him, consisting of devoted men and women who wished to live in his presence and learn his teaching.

This young seeker, drawn by his longing and his admiration of the sage, travelled to Tiruvannamalai in order to settle there. The surroundings were wretchedly poor, and climate inhospitable, but the atmosphere was spiritually rich and serene.



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi



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Being a highly practical and down-to-earth man by nature, this westerner also possessed a vast store of medical knowledge. He had given up a well-established medical practice in South Germany to come to India, feeling that his further development required such a step. Having learnt since his very childhood to serve and care for others in need, and unmindful of hardship, he was well-suited to the extreme difficulties of life in South India. He set about immediately, upon arrival, to put into practice the precepts of the great sage Ramana, and to experience them in their uniqueness. Most seekers came and went, unable to confront their own inner poverty, which was mirrored so powerfully in the unbelievable external poverty of the locals. But this young man remained steadfast in his conviction. He began to give free treatment and medicines to the needy people, and, at the same time, continued his own spiritual sadhana. He was firm in his faith that the ineffable and deathless presence of the sage would guide him on, and thus was undaunted by the problems whatever they be! After all, the very reason that he had come so far from home was not to shirk from anything hard or unpleasant and to learn, once and for all, to meet and embrace every difficulty whether within himself or in others. Only in this way, he realized he could develop a heart, which, while serving the outwardly poor, could at the same time rise beyond its own inner limitations.

After years of intense inner effort, coupled with dedicated service to the destitute, this man has achieved what he had sought for. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was experienced by him as a living reality. "You are not different from the world, nor is the world different from you." These simple but profound words of the great sage had filled his life and actions of this young man, and were never to be lost again!

He became, afterwards, the living expression of this great truth for so many. We who came later and saw this man's selfless service to the people here, wished to follow his rarest example and learn, as he had, to honour within the hearts and bodies of the poor the one indivisible spirit that indwells in all. It's as simple as that! All these charitable activities were founded to make this opportunity possible. They are, in fact and truth, acts of profound gratitude, which flowed from the heart of this one man (now in his seventies), to the people of India and their most eminent spiritual son, Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Arunachala.



It is the greatest privilege to be able to serve the rejected,
the unloved and the despised

The man to whom this story refers, is Mr. Hugo Maier. Mr. Maier lived 16 years within Sri Ramana's hermitage. Afterwards he settled 4 kilometres away at the foot of mount Arunachala, in a totally barren and ravaged wasteland. Under his attentive care, this land blossomed into a small fertile paradise. Mr. Maier deeply feels that this transformation is the most suitable metaphor to describe the unfolding of the Shanthimalai Research & Development Trust: from desert land into rich green fields - from hopeless forsakenness into confident joy...

Mr. Maier directs and inspires all the activities of the Trust and reminds us daily that it is the greatest privilege to be able to serve the rejected, the unloved and the despised and that it is the quickest way to come away from one's small self.



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This is a privilege that Mr Maier has made possible by his own example and life. Through the realization that true spirituality is always the loving compassionate interrelationship with all living beings, our charitable activities developed step by step. What started in the beginning with just the medical sector and individual aid for the needy led later on to the founding by Mr. Maier of Shanthimalai Research & Development Trust. Together with our Indian friends, the offered 'Help for self-help', has been co-ordinated by this charitable institution since that time.

Charitable Support

The Shanthimalai Research and Development Trust (SRDT) has received generous support and co-operation over the years from a number of European and American foundations and charitable organisations including: Caritas of Germany; Freundeskreis Indien, Germany; Karl Kübel-Stiftung, Bensheim; Kindermismissionswerk, Aachen; The European Union, Brussels; Stiftung Freundeskreis Indien, Switzerland; Terres des hommes, Switzerland; The Stanley Johnson Foundation, Bern; Migros, Zürich; Friends of India, USA; The MacArthur Foundation, USA.



Early morning queue at the Clinic gate

Health Care

Good health is the most important prerequisite for an active, happy, and productive life. Because of this, medical care is the very basis of our work here. It was also the



International support



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starting point. As many of the visiting friends are doctors, nurses or other health care workers, they were the very first the poor of the area sought out. In the early eighties they treated the sick out of the private home of one of these doctors. Every morning the road outside his home was crowded with patients who had already walked for many hours (having come from as far as 20 kms away). From two in the morning, they would begin to arrive, squatting patiently in the roadside dust, waiting for the gate to open.

Sri Ramana Maharshi Health Centre

An extensive clinic, simply constructed with a thatched roof, was built in the winter of 1989/90 to house the Sri Ramana Maharshi Health Clinic. Over 200 patients, who are from the very poorest of the area, are now treated here daily free-of-charge. Their basic medical needs are attended to, and they are educated in proper nourishment and hygiene. The necessary vitamins and minerals are also offered free-of-charge. The outpatient department has its own pharmacy, laboratory, physiotherapy facilities, X-Ray unit and ultrasound equipment. The present staff consists of four Indian doctors, three pharmacists with two assistants, two physiotherapists, two nurses, two laboratory assistants, and other administrative personnel.

An area of 30 kilometres is currently being serviced by the clinic. Over 90,000 patients have been registered, who have collectively received over 234,000 treatments. More recently, emphasis is being placed on the treatment of tuberculosis through the organisation of TB camps. All TB patients are now treated at Shanthimalai, with the close co-operation and support of the Indian government.

Pharmacy

The pharmacy is able to provide practically all the prescribed medicine. Also, trained assistants are able to produce much of the herbal-based medicines themselves. After consultation, the patients are routed to the dispensary, where the prescribed medicines and the relevant instructions are given to them.



The Clinic pharmacy



The Pharmacy staff



Laboratory Technician at the Clinic



Laboratory Technician at the Clinic



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Diagnostic Centre

A small laboratory was established in 1993, in order to provide a wide range of simple diagnostic tests. This helps the patients to have the tests at minimum cost, without delay, and further treatment if needed.

Alternative Medicine

Apart from traditional Western allopathic medicine, alternative approaches such as acupuncture and homeopathy are also being practiced. In addition, the Indians have their own time-honoured approaches to health, in the form of Ayurveda and Siddha medicine, derived from thousands of years of knowledge and experience. In the Ayurvedic and Siddha approaches, sickness is a disturbance of the harmonious interplay and balance of mental and physical functions. The remedies, based on medicinal herbs, minerals and metals, help to restore this balance. Out of the Research wing of the Trust these medicines are dispensed to the patients along with Allopathic and Homeopathy.



Injections given at the Clinic

Helping The Lame To Walk

Appandai's legs look as thin and brittle as dry twigs. Splayed before him on Mr. Victor's table, they look ready to snap apart at a touch. They are useless, almost superfluous. Appandai, like several other children in the area, has infantile paralysis, and today he is attending a Polio Camp at the Sri Ramana Maharshi Clinic. Early in the morning, the disabled children are driven from their homes together with their mothers by the Shanthimalai bus and brought to the clinic's physiotherapy section. Seated on the floor they wait their turn patiently until called to be examined by Mr. Victor, the clinic's physiotherapist. Individually he will test them, move them, talk to them, and make his recommendations. He prescribes crutches, braces or orthopaedic shoes and in some cases an operation. Now and then he speaks the magic words: this can be corrected. For the children and anxious mothers concerned, a small miracle will take place



Herbal medicines being grown at Shanthimalai



Electro-therapy in use at the Clinic



Electro-therapy in use at the Clinic



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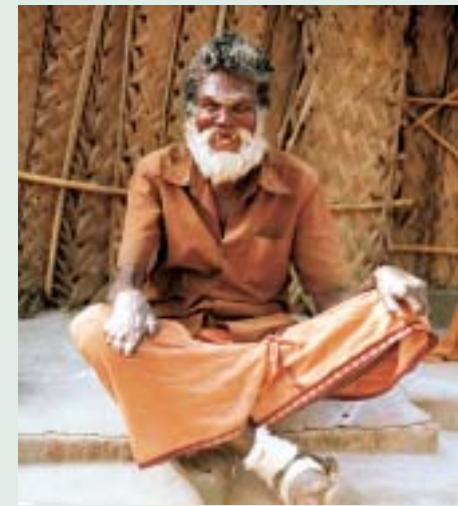
The Mobile Clinic



Treatment in the village by the Mobile Clinic

Leprosy Care Village:

The days when leprosy afflicted persons were shunned by society and compelled to live in separate settlements are no longer there. By awareness-messages to villagers, periodical treatment and financial support given to relatives of the patients for caring for them in their own homes, the disease is now controlled with modern medicines and the stigma is totally erased. There are about 40 cases who are taken care of by Sri Ramana Maharshi Health Centre now.



A victim of Leperosy

Health Awareness

Because entrenched habits cannot be changed overnight, an enormous amount of patience and empathy are required to implement the adage prevention is better than cure. SRDT holds regular meetings in the numerous villages, at which the importance of clean water, good nourishment and hygiene is stressed. At such gatherings, the village folk are also informed about the various immunisation and vaccination programs that are available to them.

Mobile Clinic

Without transport or even money to pay for a simple rickshaw ride, the seriously ill are often confined to their primitive huts, with no outside assistance whatsoever. Mobile clinics were established to meet this specific need and also to foster an awareness of good nourishment and hygiene through health education. In this regard, the mobile clinics have now started to carry a library of Tamil books, which are loaned to the villagers for a specific period of time. This library consists of books on health, hygiene, family harmony and also some Indian classics. This new aspect of village upliftment has been well received.

The mobile clinic teams (which comprise a fully qualified doctor, two nurses and a health worker) set off from the clinic early in the morning, and only return when the last patient has been attended to. For this purpose, the German Kübel Stiftung has donated two well-equipped vehicles. These mobile clinics visit each of the 40 participating villages once a week.



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During the winter of 1996, an unusually heavy monsoon brought devastating floods to this region, with thousands being trapped in their villages. Mud-walled huts simply melted away under the heavy downpours, making hundreds homeless. The mobile clinics were in constant operation at this time, distributing blankets, clothes, and food to those affected in addition to medicines, and arranging shelter when needed.

Health Workers and First Aid

These are active women, who have been selected from the villages and given excellent training in health care. Responsible for health education and first-aid for their communities, they care for the sick within their own village homes and ensure that the severely ill are treated by our doctors through the mobiles or in the Health Centre.



Mobile Clinic medicines

They also arrange special clinics or camps for health check-ups, especially for the elderly and the physically handicapped. These workers assist in eye, dental, polio, diabetes and tuberculosis camps held in the Trust premises periodically. Villagers afflicted with such disorders, are given free treatment and backup medical support wherever needed. Cases that cannot be treated by the clinic or its mobile units are referred to outside specialists, with the SRDT taking care of the patient's transport, attendance and subsequent medical costs. Such camps are well attended. Reading glasses have been provided to many wherever necessary. Cataract operations have also been financed. An AIDS awareness program has recently been launched and regular follow up is done by these workers.

Our Current Project - The Sri Ramana Maharshi Hospital

'Can you give us a medical centre for our mothers and children?' was a request made by our village representatives. The nearest maternity and paediatric clinics are a bumpy three hour bus ride away, with the result that village women have no specialised care during pregnancy and childbirth, nor in the critical time after delivery.

The Ramana Maharshi Rangammal Hospital has been inaugurated this spring (2001), and is functioning with the help



Mother and Baby at the Clinic



First-aid in the village



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of SRDT. The main activities of the hospital are mother and child care services. This includes departments for family planning, prenatal and postnatal care, operation theatres, gynaecology, obstetrics, paediatrics, ultrasound, and premature birth care and fulfils the basic demand of the villagers.

Women's Development

Women are the backbone of the society especially in all underdeveloped countries. In Indian villages the women bear the major burden of taking care of the home and helping the man in all spheres of work, especially as it is an agro-based work culture. In appreciation of the problems of village women (illiteracy, economic deprivation, neglect and abuse) and also the inner strength with which they work to bring up the family against all odds, a programme was developed for social and economic upliftment of the women of the villages from 1992.

Growth of Cottage Industries and Women Sangams:

From 1992 a vital outreach programme was planned and put into action. Group of women from villages formed into Sangams and started saving money. Also the young widows, deserted wives and adolescent girls who have discontinued schooling, were selected and trained in crafts like Tailoring, Leather-working, Embroidery, Doll Making, etc.

From 1994, village women who have passed the Higher Secondary Examination were selected and trained as village workers in health and Women's programmes. Caritas, Germany and the MacArthur Foundation, USA, funded the programme in training the staff and for conducting Special Awareness Courses, Leadership Training Programmes and Skill Training in various crafts for village women and youths. These groups were selected with the help of Madhar Sangam members and local village leaders.



The New Sri Ramana Maharshi Hospital



Madhar Sangam in action

The various skills training resulted in development of small production units, which led to the organisation of economic units called Cottage Industries in the Shanthimalai campus, assisted by Technical Training staff and Cottage Industry managers, etc. The social upliftment of Womens Sangam Groups branched into Womens Development Sangam in villages (now called Self Help Groups).



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Sangam to SHG'S:

The Women's small saving groups developed problems due to interface with men as it involved handling money and the illiterate women did not have a say about utilisation of money saved by them. So these were dissolved and from 1995, by awareness programme through songs, video films and group discussions, women were encouraged to form groups of 15-20 members who are married, in the age range of 18- 60 years, have earning capacity and belonging to the same village. They were encouraged to save Rs. 10 per month and pool it together to form a savings group. These savings were deposited into Banks and soon this developed into a revolving fund of their own for small loans for themselves, managed by their own elected representatives. Slowly the savings increased from Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 to Rs. 50 and they found that they can save, pool the resources, manage their money and also get out of the clutches of money-lenders who were thorns in their flesh. Thus from 85 self help groups in 40 villages in 1995, the SHGs have grown into 220 groups with a membership of 3906 with a revolving fund of Rs. 42,44,677 by the year 2000. The Nationalised banks gave loans at the ratio of 1:2 and about 100 groups have availed this facility and improved their economic condition.

The savings in the first two years were utilised more for consumer expenses and fulfilling their personal needs like repayment of debts, redeeming of pledged jewelry and purchase of household items etc. Now individuals and groups have turned to small income generation activities like goat rearing, milch animals, tea-shops, fruit and vegetable shops, bangle selling and cloth trades etc.

Awareness of social issues and finding solutions has led to participation in village programmes. Improving the drinking water, sanitation and transport facilities, etc. are issues the groups have taken up with Government authorities for developing their respective villages.

SHG groups initiated action to get land from local Panchayat to build community centres with the help of Caritas, the funding agency, so that women who are trained in the crafts started working in the villages themselves. They had a place to conduct their meetings as well.

At present the SHGs have reached a stage of self-sustainability. By linking this programme into a joint programme with State Government called Mahalir Thittam, the Women's Corporation is meeting the expenses for training of groups to self-reliance and also partly support the field staff to guide them in their future income generation programmes.

It is a joyful silent revolution, SRDT and the village women have brought about in their lives. Our goal and vision of 'Help for Self Help' has effected a far reaching change in the lives of villagers through the women's SHG's. It brought an understanding in the groups that all women have the same problems irrespective of Caste,



Village uplift scheme



Village uplift scheme



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Community Status or education, and they can find a solution to them with the first step being economic independence and then education. Now most women see their daughters are educated at least upto Higher Secondary School level or they are sent for Craft training after middle school. The marriage age of girls has gone up. Instead of migration, small centres are started in villages. There is unity and harmony among the women. Interaction with other village women is more; caste consciousness is reduced and acceptance of other caste women and their ability is tolerated! Some women have taken the issues of alcoholism in the families and stopped the drinking habit of women. They find their status in the family and society has improved. On Women's Day of 2001 they expressed, "Now our words are heard, listened to and even accepted in our homes; abusive words are reduced. In offices we are welcomed and given due respect".

Orphanage

Our Children's Village nestles at the foot of mount Arunachala and is a refuge and home for neglected, and abandoned children. Here, 36 children, aged 2 to 15 years, live in three houses, lovingly cared for by their Ammas (Orphanage Mothers). SRDT provided the necessary land for the houses, while Terres des Hommes of Switzerland financed most of the construction costs. SRDT finances the operating costs. Sri Ramana Maharshi Matriculation Higher Secondary School educates these children, while the Sri Ramana Maharshi Health Centre takes care of their health needs.



THE STORY OF ONE OF OUR CHILDREN

Lakshmi was 12 when she was taken in. Her mother died when she was very small; when her father remarried she found herself unwanted. They sent her to Madras to work for a family as a maid. She was maliciously treated, burned, kicked and neglected. Fortunately Lakshmi had an aunt who worked in the Shanthimalai canteen, who brought her to the Trust seeking help. Today she has a new home, a new life and a family who care for her. She herself now helps with the mothering of the younger children.



Morning at the Childrens Village Scheme



CVS girls helping with the cooking



CVS children playing in the sand



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Realizing that the most important factor in such a home is the ability of the house mother and the staff to provide the children a sense of deep security and love, we have chosen persons who can fulfil this need. We know that it is not enough to offer a child a place to sleep and adequate food. They must have guidance of adults who can help them develop a sense of true responsibility towards themselves and life. The children are therefore given tasks such as gardening, cooking, helping each other with their studies, etc., which develop in them a sense of mutual caring and love. This project has brought both the children involved and the people of the Trust, great joy.



Villagers carrying water from community taps

Community Development

The various programmes for community development grew quite organically out of the field of medical work and now run hand-in-hand with it. From the beginning, it was obvious that many chronic physical and mental illnesses were a direct result of poverty. People lived in the most appalling conditions! Poor nourishment, lack of hygiene, and infested drinking and bathing water made a mockery of health awareness. Such problems are being overcome slowly by the ongoing efforts to raise general living standards, especially through education. Generations of poverty destroyed any semblance of community life in the villages. Being daily preoccupied with physical self-preservation, there has been no energy or will left to care for others. The result is that any community spirit that might have been left has degenerated, into “each for himself only”.

Village Upliftment: (Community Centres)



Community Development Workers

SRDT built twelve community centres for the villages. The aim is to have one building for every cluster of villages, through which more and more people can be drawn into group activities. These centres will focus on the traditional trades, such as carpentry, woodcarving, tailoring, leaf-painting, spinning, weaving and other handicrafts. Working together not only enhances the community spirit in the villages, but also helps to whittle away their entrenched prejudices and caste-consciousness.

Drinking Water

No water - no life. Often the monsoon fails. The open wells dry up or stagnate, and instead of being wells of life, become breeding grounds for disease and death. Eighty percent of all diseases in these villages come from dirty, infected water, statistics which conceal immense suffering! Shanthimalai Research and



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Repairs in progress to one of the village wells

Development Trust health workers have witnessed such suffering - people lying helplessly on straw mats strewn over the dirt floors of their huts, racked by cramps and pains, simply because they have drunk infected water. Without the availability of fresh water, they will, by necessity, continue to drink unclean water. Recent water analysis showed that water from the enclosed (and much deeper wells) is drinkable, whereas water from the open wells is full of bacteria! The Trust has drilled 30 new borewells and deepened and repaired 33 of the older open-type wells. Water from the borewells is piped to various locations within the villages to minimise carrying distances. Water conservation is further promoted through the Share-a-well program, in which participating farmers have their wells deepened free-of-charge. In return, they are required to share their newly-deepened well with a minimum of ten other households within a ten-acre area. SRDT continues to help the villagers to provide clean drinking water by digging more wells and deepening existing wells and construction of overhead tank and pumpsets and laying pipelines.



Students at play

Education and Schools: Day Schools

In 1994 the Trust established a Matriculation school with money donated from the West. It was intended specifically to serve the disadvantaged rural children. When it first opened its doors, it had more than 600 applications for admission. Half had to be turned away! Gradually we were able to expand the schools capacity, so that at present (in the school year starting June 2000), 700 children are enrolled. Although Tamil and Hindi are part of the curriculum, it is an English-medium school. Since English is the second official language in India, it is an indispensable key to all higher learning, as well as the key for entrance to the professional world and studies abroad.



Children of all castes sit together in school



School sports stars



Chemistry students in class



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The school has a well-stocked library, as well as a physics, chemistry and biology laboratory. Recently added is the Computer lab with all facilities. A variety of workshops are being planned within the school, for both boys and girls who are practically gifted.

More than half the children attending the SRDT's school are fully sponsored by western friends. Those who can afford are asked to pay the annual school fees. Although all castes are represented, the majority of children are from the so-called lower castes. For the very first time, these children from all castes are learning, playing and eating their free lunch together!

In their respective villages, low-caste children have to use a separate well for their water. They cannot even walk on the road when a so called higher-caste person is using it. Yet at our school, all the children happily drink water from the same tap and walk freely together! From the very beginning of their school experience, values of equality and deep respect for each other are instilled regardless of caste or family background.

Most of the children in the area are caught up in this vicious cycle of poverty, squalor, backbreaking drudgery, and disease that holds their parents captive! The children we have been able to include in our programs are granted insight into many of the preventable causes of this tragic cycle. They can observe firsthand the improved living standards of those from their village who have been educated and trained in a needed craft, skill or trade. They begin to understand that schooling can open wide the doors to a better future and that it is truly possible to break out of the prison of illiteracy and destitution! Through their education and increased awareness, this young generation will be able to bring about an enriched community life, based on true mutual regard. These children are so eager to go to school as education is a gift they receive with gratitude and joy!

Primary Section

With increased demand for quality education, the Trust plans from the academic year starting June 2001, to establish a separate primary section of the school with about 300 children from Class I to III. This section, under the able care of trained teachers, plans to lay stronger foundation in the standards of education and will be a feeder school to the main school. Total emphasis will be given for moral and character building in addition to regular curriculum.



Morning arrival by School bus



Morning prayer at school



Children enjoying sports



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Sponsorship Program

These children are selected for their ability and motivation from the poorest families and the Western sponsors donate the fund needed for the child's educational needs. They are chosen with the condition that their parents ensure their child's regular attendance, and allow them time off daily from home chores for their schoolwork. In some cases, the parents are even given some financial help to cover the child's contribution to the family income. Not only are their school fees paid for, the Trust also takes care of their lunches, uniforms and transportation. They are taken on educational tours and excursions, and receive a regular health check-up from Sri Ramana Maharshi Health Centre.



Sponsored children

Festival

Once a year the sponsored children celebrate and thank their sponsors with a festival, where they sing, dance, enact stories from the Indian myths and legends, and generally have a wonderful time! This festival is like Christmas for the children, for each one receives a small present, and the atmosphere is alive with their joy. Their laughing faces and dancing eyes speak for themselves!



Pupils training in traditional dance



Children engaging
in cultural
activities



A Cultural Program

Education should do more than satisfying just head and hands. Indian culture has traditionally aimed at spiritual richness, which finds its outer expression in the arts, music, dance, and acting. The school now employs teachers for Bharathanatayam, the devotional dance and classical music of South India. The children are taught to recapture in music, dance and drama, the myths and legends of their ancient heroes and heroines. The disciplines of Hatha Yoga and Pranayama, which aim at the harmonious balance of body, mind and soul are also taught. These activities are aimed at acquainting the children with the rich cultural heritage that their impoverished village lifestyle has denied them until now. Instead of comparing themselves unfavourably with westerners, they are able to acquire their own self-esteem by becoming familiar with the values of their own cultured which they can now proudly share with others. During the



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current year 2001, there are plans to import Vedic Heritage programme in all the classes as an ongoing training to develop cultural Heritage of the land.

Authorised Computer Centre

Recognising the demand and the importance of Information Technology Education for the development and future needs of the younger generation, SRDT has lined up with a recognised higher education institution, the Anna University of Chennai, and introduced the syllabus prescribed by them in the School from 4th to 9th standards.

In addition, SRDT has also plans to set up an authorised computer education centre in collaboration with Anna University to impart higher professional courses to the children who are passing out of our own school. These courses are also open to the general public of the area, and qualified candidates are awarded prestigious merit certificate by Anna University which will be a great aid to the trainees in their future higher education as well for in employment opportunities in India and abroad.



School computer centre

Cottage Industry

It started with Tailoring, Embroidery and Painting of greeting cards, with about 30 women and youths, trained by Friends of India women volunteers, with the assistance of two local teachers to interpret. It then grew into Training-cum-production unit, and more than 1000 women and youths were trained in various crafts. From the three initial units it grew into Weaving, Leather crafts, Handicrafts and Bag making, Dolls and Decorative items production, Palm leaf products, Block printing, designing of clothes, Cane furniture manufacture and Mat weaving.



Cottage industry workers

With the construction of eight village sub-centres, the women started working in their own villages. Women with families also came to work after completing their household work. Due to flexible working hours during



Men and women at work manufacturing clothing, etc. for the export market.





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Dolls made for export



Bag and Doll making in the villages
for export to the West

seasons of agricultural operation, they engaged themselves in such vocations and supplemented their income in the form of wages and agricultural produce. From 1992 to 2000 they were employed by SRDT as piece-rate workers. Even during that period they were given training to become self-employed, taught to maintain accounts, how to purchase materials and to run their own production units. In 2001, the various cargo units formed their own registered societies as independent units of production.

Their trainers and supervisors were selected as executive committee members with all workers becoming members of the respective production units. The cherished vision of SRDT "Help for Self Help" has resulted in a meaningful culmination. Now members of each society are the owners of their production unit and are managing their affairs successfully.

SRDT has provided them with the place to work, the required infrastructure and is also feeding them with export orders for sustainability. It also watches their progress and lends a helping hand whenever required.



Examples of hand-made Greetings Cards



Loom-weaving in the villages



Village lady making
incense sticks



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ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

In this semi-arid part of India, the environment is in a critical state, due to decades of abuse, i.e. over-planting, cutting of trees and over-population. The drastically diminished annual rainfall has also contributed to its ravaged state. In many areas the basic requirements for plant growth are no longer available. Seventy percent of the Indian population depends on agriculture for their livelihood in spite of these critical problems. In the light of this, a department of Environment and Sustainable Agriculture has been created to deal directly and forcefully with these problems and bring about sustainable solutions.

The Kannappa Model Farm and Training Centre

A productive model farm was created 6 years ago on a 21 acre stretch of barren land, which is centrally located to most of our villages. It has subsequently been transformed into a multi-functional farmhouse/training centre, modern dairy/milking parlour, and biogas plant. It is used also to demonstrate the viability of good agriculture, dairy, plant nursery, worm culture and other environmental practices. Agricultural experts, trainers, and research specialists are frequently invited to hold discussions, seminars and practical demonstrations for the staff and local farmers.



The milking shed at the dairy farm

Dairy

The cow is pivotal to the life of the rural India. Milk is such an indispensable and integral part of their diet. But often the village cows, due to poor fodder, bad water, and general ignorance about their proper care, can give very little milk! Of poor quality and most often diluted with water, it can be a source of disease, instead of strength to the villagers. For this reason, a dairy with a capacity for 100 cows has been set up on the Kannappa farm. The goal of our dairy is fourfold:



The Kannappa Model Farm from the road



The Kannappa model farm



The indoor feeding pen



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1. To introduce better milk-yielding breeds of cows.
2. To impart knowledge to the locals about modern methods of Dairy maintenance.
3. To provide cows for the poor as a means of livelihood.
4. For rendering timely medical help to the village cattle.

1. Animal husbandry and selective-breeding practices are used in order to increase the milk capacity of the cows in a natural, unforced way. High-pedigree bulls have been purchased, which will strengthen and refine the milk-yielding properties of the new generation of cows, and make them more disease-resistant.

2. The farm has a hygienic milking room with modern machines and facilities and fields for inexpensive but nutritious fodder production and storage. The villagers learn simple and better ways to feed and milk their cows from these farm facilities.

3. Each year about 20 cows are donated to the poor (who would never qualify for a bank loan to make such a purchase). First of all the recipients are required to undergo training in cattle rearing and fodder cultivation. This gives them a well-known avocation suited to local condition for a livelihood.

4. With financial help of Caritas, our Veterinary Doctor visits the village cattle and renders medical aid whenever required. In addition poultry and cattle are brought for treatment to our model dairy, where treatment and medicines are provided, and raw and artificial insemination facilities are provided.

Sri Ramana Maharshi Natural Remedies:

India has a 3,000-year-old medical heritage, one of the earliest in the world. It also has one of the richest botanical traditions, with over 7,000 species of plants. Medicinal herbs and plants form the core of the Indians ancient medical lore. SRDT, in partnership with an international non-governmental organisation, Danida of Denmark, is helping the conservation of India's medicinal plants. We have established a botanical garden of local herbal and medicinal flora, which serves as a living gene bank for the preservation of the rapidly endangered species.



Cattle resting at the farm



The Herbal Plants Centre



The Natural Medicinal Herb Garden



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The Spagyric extraction process

Plants are collected and brought to the centre for propagation. An inventory of available varieties and their uses have been made. Village people with specialised knowledge of these plants have identified over 200 medicinal species, within our immediate surroundings! Medicinal herb gardens, based on the knowledge acquired in our medicinal park, have been planted in the villages to provide a simple and inexpensive solution to many common ailments and diseases. Effective treatment can now take place at home. Under its Research and Development wing, Sri Ramana Maharshi Natural Remedies have brought out 22 herbal powders which are effective cures for many common ailments. It has obtained the State's manufacturing licence for production and sale of these products. Research is still on in the production of 12 medicines under spagyric method in liquid form which have potency to cure diseases like Diabetes. Heart diseases, etc. and once the licensing formalities are completed, we will be able to produce this in large-scale for use not only in India but for export to other countries which may earn the much needed source of income for the Trust's development activities.



The Spagyric extraction process

Sustainable Agriculture

A very successful reforestation program that the SRDT is involved in, contains and helps reduce the rampant soil erosion brought on by overgrazing and over-cultivation. It also encourages the preservation of endangered species of trees and plants. In the Kannappa Farm nurseries, trees are cultivated that provide shade, fruit, firewood, herbal medicine, and fodder. Special emphasis is given to drought-resistant fruit trees. All these seedlings are made available to the village people at a very nominal cost, and



Potted Herbs grown in complimentary groups



The Herb drying shed



Hibiscus flowers drying in the shed



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assistance is given in their planting and maintenance. Propagation methods (i.e. grafting, seed collection etc.) of trees and shrubs are also taught.

Sustainable farming techniques such as developing crop diversity, sound crop rotation patterns, and crop-compatibility strategies are also demonstrated. After learning these techniques, the village Youth Clubs, Women's Societies, and Farmers Clubs, teach and demonstrate this knowledge to their respective villages. Trainees become convincing trainers. Composting and the rational use of farmyard manure and organic fertilisers, together with biological pest and weed-control methods, contributes to the health of the environment as a whole.

Cash crops of fruit, vegetables and medicinal herbs, together with drought-resistant species of mango, sapota, guava and pomegranate are continually being experimented with to ascertain which varieties give the best yield in the prevailing soil and climatic conditions. In addition, varieties of vegetables (like green zucchini and broccoli) not native to India are being introduced locally. Experiments with seed propagation are also underway to increase productivity and disease immunity. High yield varieties of seeds and bio-fertilizers are distributed free to the farmers to inspire them in their continued use for better crops and reasonable yield.



A Kannappa farm worker

In the entire organisation (whether in the administration, the clinic, the production units, the school, the gardens, in the fields or in the village work), hundreds of people from different backgrounds and levels of education are employed, and live in a deep, unforced, and natural reciprocity. This precious mutuality should, in due time, transmit itself into the villages, because most of them are from among the villages.

TO CONCLUDE — some thoughts from Dr. Maier, our founder

Oppressed by misery, and sorrow, enfeebled by suffering and want, man is paralysed through his hopelessness. He can't think of anything else but of his survival. In this situation, how can he turn to the higher values of life? Even the memory of them has disappeared. In darkness about his higher self and exhausted through perpetual want, how can he still think of and believe in something greater? Having lost all faith in himself, he flees into the abyss of disbelief and superstition.



Distillation of the Spagyric Herbal Extracts



Some of the Herbal Products for export and usage in the Shanthimalai Clinics



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Dr. Maier

The true meaning of financial help, is to enable man to find a way out of this dull state, with its inherent fatalism. Such help should give him the strength to return once more to his true Self, and thus fulfil the deeper meaning of life. Clouded by material sorrows, it is often difficult, and sometimes even impossible, for man to find the way to an indwelling stillness, in which he can pursue the search for his true Being.

When man finds the way back to himself, he also finds the way back to his fellow beings, through his reawakened love for his neighbour! He is, once more, capable of living up to a real community life. This is the ultimate aim of our material aid; that man recognises himself as a spiritual identity. Its purpose is not that he loses himself once again in his newly-found material well-being (with its competitive ambition). If he does so, later on, he will find himself in the very same desolation and wretchedness, but simply on a different level!

Life is growth. Each standstill in man's development hinders and even smothers his unfoldment. "Standstill is regression". A dull, bogged-down mind has first to find the way back to and become conscious of itself as a personality. Only then, when man knows himself as a self-confident individual, will he be able to make efforts by his own initiative to grow into his true spiritual identity.

Herein lies the hidden meaning of life and its fulfilment that man knows himself as an eternal soul. In this knowledge, he becomes truly himself, without the need to prove himself in any way.

Within this rediscovered, fulfilled awareness, all compulsions born out of a "must" fall off by their own accord. Here, all doing has become the spontaneous outflow of the love, the peace and the infinite joy of the Spiritual Man. Here one experiences a truly unpretentious, unfeigned, and unsophisticated living together, being together and working together. In this way, neither pride nor inferiority stands between man and man.

Again, the deepest value of financial help lies in this. Here, matter serves truly for spiritual evolution, out of the darkness of not being oneself, into the experience of what one truly is. Man then is a true manifestation of the one Father of us all, i.e. "I am that I am".

When money dominates man's life, he is enshrouded in darkest ignorance. Money should help for true realization. When it is shared, it becomes a blessing for both the helper and the helped, i.e. for the giver, as well as for the receiver. What can be a curse, can also be a blessing. Like a coin, everything has two faces.

Service to one's suffering fellow-beings (i.e. love for one's neighbour) is an indispensable aspect of Self-finding. He who puts this into practice will undoubtedly progress. All religions are different paths to the one Truth, the one Being. The ways are many, the goal is one.

In this connection, a very pregnant oriental saying comes to mind: "O you who are pious, aspire to become wise soon, because the pious think mainly of



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themselves. Yet the wise serve all living beings, realizing them as part of their own True Self”.

The East, like the West, lost its balance through a one-sided development. In the East, the unfolding of the inner man was over emphasised. Consequently, the evolution of the outer man within the world was neglected, and the external form of life became impoverished. In the West, the evolution of the outer form of life and the outer man was over-stressed. The result was the opposite lopsidedness. True balance can be brought about only by a complementary, holistic approach, and not through dividing and comparing these two aspects. It is the same with men and women. Comparison brings about opposition, while the effort for mutual togetherness brings about unity in its fulfilled Oneness.

In the battle of life, it often seems that the spirit of complacency, passivity and despair, is the mightier power. But the Spirit of truth, commitment and compassion has always the longer breath, and that, in the end, decides the battle. To help the people here truly requires the longer breath, which can only arise from this spirit of truth, commitment, and compassion. This spirit alone can bring up projects which are of lasting value to these people.

Our Motto: “Help for Self-help” is not just empty words. It is the only dignified way to help, for the givers as well as for the receivers. We are learning this daily, We continue to learn it better and more profoundly.

All these developmental activities have become possible only due to the philanthropic generosity of people all around the world. The projects described above cover the basic needs of the people and require improvement on a continuous basis. They can be sustained and improved only by the magnanimous financial and other supports of the people - direct and indirect. We welcome one and all to see the progress for themselves in person and in the name of all beneficiaries we thank for all contributions. The Trust is also happy to provide details and progress reports to anyone who likes to commit himself.

FOUNDER Dr. Hugo Maier

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Detailed financial reports pertaining to the Shanthimalai Research and Development Trust are available to anyone wishing to make a donation. We deeply thank the many donors who have so generously supported the Trust. Without their invaluable assistance, many of these projects would not have come to fruition

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